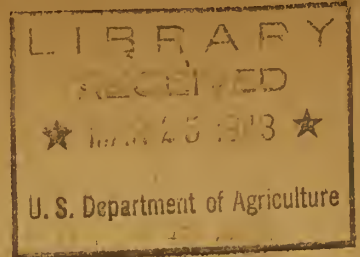


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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
U. S. Food Distribution Administration
Fruit and Vegetable Branch
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THE SALVAGE AND REUSE OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLE CONTAINERS

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General Lumber Situation

The users and suppliers of lumber in 1942 were caught in a squeeze because of increased demand for lumber as a result of the larger amounts necessary for military uses and to the decreased production which resulted from labor and equipment shortages and general organization and replacement problems. As a result of the increased demand, the estimated consumption of lumber in 1942 went up 11 percent over that of 1941. Also in 1942 the production of lumber failed by about 20 percent to equal consumption. The deficit was made up by imports and by withdrawals from inventories. This drain upon supplies has now depleted the stocks of lumber to about 50 percent of normal. Considering the fact that the inventory reserve represents a wide variety of sizes, species, and grades, this small proportional stock represents a very small supply of individual types for emergencies in 1942.

By exercising the severest restrictions, it is estimated that apparent consumption in 1943 can be held to a little over 31 billion board feet, which is about 25 percent below the consumption of last year. Although it is possible to reduce the lumber consumption for certain uses during 1943 from that of the past year, increases for other uses will be inevitable. These are chiefly for boxes and crates used as containers for products shipped overseas. Other military requirements, such as construction, are expected to drop. However, it may be necessary for civilian construction to bear the brunt of the major portion of the reduction in the use of lumber in 1943 below that of 1942. In doing this it may be necessary to restrict civilian construction this year to about one-half that of last year and to about one-third of that of 1941. This restriction would eliminate all but the bare essentials of construction and maintenance. Even with this restricted use, however, it is possible that labor, equipment, tire and replacement problems may reduce the 1943 production and imports below the requirements of these minimum essentials, and thus make further inroads upon the already scanty lumber reserves by the end of 1943. This makes any program for conserving lumber during the current year of vital importance.

Fruit and Vegetable Containers

The total estimated minimum essential requirements for containers and shipping material, such as boxes, crating and dunnage, has increased about 30 percent for 1943 over the consumption of 1942. Most of this increase has been for military shipments. Some materials have been forced to wood containers as a result of the scarcity of other package materials such as metals. Other types of supplies are being put in wooden packages in order to secure a more substantial container for overseas shipping.

The fresh fruit and vegetable container picture is somewhat different from that for all commodities. These producers will likely be able to get along with a slightly smaller quantity of wooden containers in 1943 than was the case in 1942. Assuming 1942 packing practices and per-acre production, and the 1943 goals, the total number of board feet of lumber to package the 1943 crop would be about one percent less than that required in 1942. This will probably be further reduced through the use of containers of substitute materials and limited shipments of products in bulk. However, these adjustments cannot be sufficient to offset possible shortages of container material, increased container demands for military shipments, and thus avert a tight package situation.

Used Containers

One method of supplementing the tight fruit and vegetable container situation is by the careful salvaging and reuse of second-hand packages. Every salvaged used container made available for reuse makes a number of contributions to the general supply situation and the war effort. One of these is the fact that this container may package a product which may, in an acute container situation, not be made available to consumers. Another, the use of the salvaged package will release to other uses labor and equipment which would be necessary to make another new box or basket. In addition, it will release such critical materials as wood and metal to be used in other war activities. Considering the many possibilities of salvaging used containers, the amount of this material is considerable. For instance, there are enough board feet of wood in one thousand salvaged apple boxes to crate an average airplane for overseas shipment. There is enough metal in 60 wire-bound orange boxes to supply the nails and straps for crating a jeep for overseas shipment. One thousand wire-bound citrus boxes have about 500 pounds of metal. Thus, if a quarter of the 18 million new wire-bound citrus boxes used each year were salvaged and reused, it would release 2,250,000 pounds of metal to be used for such vital war activities as the making of shells, tanks, and guns. This saving also benefits the fruit and vegetable growers as difficulties are being experienced in securing supplies of wire and nails for packages.

Extensive work is already being done in salvaging used containers in certain of the large markets. Detailed information is, of course, limited but a recent survey by the War Production Board indicates that approximately 25 percent of all wooden fruit and vegetable containers which are shipped into New York City are salvaged. This varies greatly among the various types of containers, the percentage being very high for such packages as baskets and much lower for nailed boxes. This custom seems to be general. A representative group of vegetable growers in the Chicago area recently reported that 65 percent of their used containers were baskets, 24 percent were crates, and only 11 percent were boxes. Used or second-hand containers are more extensively used by growers in the nearby or market garden areas than in the distant producing districts because of the difficulty and expense of shipping used containers to distant producing centers. Thus, crates, baskets and other packages which are shipped into the large consuming centers are salvaged and sold to growers in the nearby producing districts and used by them in marketing their products in that particular city or

nearby centers. Some estimates indicate that as much as 60 percent of the vegetables grown in the Chicago market garden area are marketed in second-hand containers. The proportion, of course, becomes less as the distance from the city increases, but information recently collected by Cornell University indicates that growers in some of the interior counties of New York State are depending on used containers for as much as 35 percent of their total package requirements.

In the larger cities used containers are collected by a number of agencies. Farmers who live in the nearby districts collect a portion from the retail stores direct. Many peddlers collect the empty containers from retailers and restaurants. Second-hand dealers or "junkies" arrange with trash collectors to separate the containers and scrap pieces from the other material. The largest group collecting used containers consists of chain stores.

Used package dealers buy containers from the "junkies", peddlers, and chain stores and sort them into the various types. These dealers also repair damaged packages and remake others into types more generally in demand. The dealers resell these sorted and repaired packages to farmers in the nearby districts, or to large second-hand wholesalers who may distribute them into the market garden districts of adjacent cities or to other production centers.

As stated, the remaking of other types of containers from such packages as orange and apple boxes has become an established business in the larger cities. From material in these boxes, crates are made for the packing of such products as cabbage, beans, carrots, onions, and other vegetables.

Reconditioning, as well as remaking, is an important enterprise. Reclaimed pieces of containers, second-hand nails and wire are used to repair damaged hampers, baskets or covers. A second-hand wire handle, a bent nail or two, with a salvaged slat, will many times restore a useless damaged container to good condition.

In addition to collecting, remaking and remodeling, careful handling by all dealers all along the line to prevent needless damage is important. Many parts of potentially good containers which might be used are thrown on fires in the markets on cold mornings.

Attention to all of these factors in regard to used containers will increase the supply of fruit and vegetable packages and permit the use of material, which would otherwise be required for new containers, to be used for other vital uses. Therefore, the program which is operating rather smoothly in the large cities should be expanded and similar types should be developed in the smaller centers.

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